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• (1725)

[*English*]

The Chair (Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Thank you all very much.

I apologize to our witnesses for the delay, but you know how it is.

Mr. Lewis, happy birthday. Since I missed congratulating you for your bill, I didn't want to miss your birthday, at least.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Monday, June 6, the committee is beginning its study of the potential impacts of the ArriveCAN application on certain Canadian sectors.

In the first panel, we have with us, from Canada Border Services Agency, Denis Vinette, vice-president of the travellers branch. From the Public Health Agency of Canada, we have Marie-Hélène Lévesque, director general of the centre for compliance, enforcement and exemptions.

Welcome to you both.

We will start with opening remarks of no more than five minutes, please.

Mr. Vinette, the floor is yours.

Mr. Denis Vinette (Vice-President, Travellers Branch, Canada Border Services Agency): Thank you, Madam Chair.

[*Translation*]

Good afternoon, everyone.

[*English*]

Thank you for inviting me to participate in the discussion today.

Since the start of the pandemic, the Government of Canada has taken significant action to limit the introduction and spread of COVID-19 in Canada by ensuring the safety and security of our borders. As the pandemic rapidly unfolded, the government put in place travel and health measures to reduce the risk of the importation and transmission of COVID-19 and new variants in Canada related to international travel.

The Canada Border Services Agency, the CBSA, administers or assists other federal departments and agencies, as well as the provinces and territories, in the administration of over 100 acts and regulations. The Public Health Agency of Canada, PHAC, is re-

sponsible for the Quarantine Act and the orders in council that outline travellers' obligations when entering Canada. This means that any changes to Canada's border measures related to COVID-19 are under the authority of PHAC, and the CBSA works in close co-operation to implement and operationalize the measures put in place.

The CBSA and PHAC co-created and launched ArriveCAN in April, 2020 to support the Government of Canada's efforts to limit the spread of COVID-19. ArriveCAN was developed to eliminate an onerous and unmanageable volume of paper forms and allow for real-time collection of information to support the compliance and enforcement of critical public health measures. Like every other element of the Government of Canada's COVID-19 response, our border measures are informed by available data, operational considerations, scientific evidence and monitoring of the epidemiological situation, both in Canada and internationally.

Currently, all travellers continue to be required to submit their mandatory information in ArriveCAN, using the free mobile application or website, up to 72 hours before arriving in Canada, or before boarding a cruise ship destined for Canada. For those flying to Canada, submission needs to be completed before boarding.

ArriveCAN is free and secure, and it is the official Government of Canada platform to provide your information when entering Canada. ArriveCAN can only be used by travellers when travelling to Canada, and all travellers must use ArriveCAN when entering Canada, regardless of the mode of entry. ArriveCAN is available to download as a mobile app, or you can create an account online and sign in online.

The use of ArriveCAN, which is mandatory, expedites processing and helps protect the health and safety of travellers and our own CBSA employees. It is the fastest, easiest and most secure way for travellers to show that they meet public health requirements.

Travellers can help minimize delays by ensuring that their ArriveCAN submission is completed within 72 hours of arrival at the border with all of the required information, including vaccination evidence. The completion of ArriveCAN before arriving at the border helps to improve the flow across the border and to minimize delays.

I am also happy to share that we have had a successful traveller usage rate. As of May 2, 2022, over 99% of travellers in the air mode used ArriveCAN, and 94% used it in the land mode.

While we are moving in the direction of prepandemic travel levels, the reality is that we are still in a pandemic. Therefore, travellers are returning to a border that is managed differently, with continually evolving COVID-19 requirements. ArriveCAN is an integral tool to help us manage this travel through our borders and ensure that we continue keeping Canadians safe from the threat of COVID-19.

Thank you. I will be happy to answer questions from committee members in either official language.

• (1730)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Vinette.

Go ahead, Ms. Lévesque, please.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Lévesque (Director General, Centre for Compliance, Enforcement and Exemptions, Public Health Agency of Canada): Thank you, Madam Chair.

[Translation]

Since the beginning of the pandemic, the Public Health Agency of Canada has directed the implementation of border measures to help reduce the spread of COVID-19 by international travellers entering Canada. ArriveCAN information submitted by travellers is key to administering testing, quarantine and public health requirements that remain in place.

Fully vaccinated travellers do not have to quarantine, but may be selected for mandatory randomized testing. Although the mandatory random testing program for travellers arriving by air has been paused for the rest of June, it will resume in July once testing has moved off site from airports.

[English]

ArriveCAN has been, and remains, a valuable tool for the Government of Canada to administer the border measures that have been put in place to mitigate the risks of COVID-19 associated with international travel.

ArriveCAN allows travellers to digitally enter their information in an efficient manner and the government to share this information with provinces and territories. This in turn enables the provinces and territories to contact travellers, who may have COVID, when they enter their jurisdiction. In addition, it enables information exchange with local law enforcement, who can use the data to guide their interventions and to enforce quarantine and isolation requirements.

Data collected using ArriveCAN is critical to PHAC's ability to monitor, assess, and respond to variants of concern and variants of interest that pose a threat to the health and safety of Canadians and Canada's ongoing economic recovery. It allows us to continue moving towards a more flexible and responsive approach to managing COVID-19 at our borders as it helps inform public health advice to ensure the health and safety of Canadians is safeguarded.

The Government of Canada has gone to great lengths to publicize the ArriveCAN requirement, and has undertaken several media

campaigns over the last 18 months in an effort to get the word out. The most recent campaign ended in late May and was designed to reach individuals who had not travelled since the beginning of the pandemic.

[Translation]

ArriveCAN is available as both an application and a web portal, both of which have met high standards for accessibility. There are a number of supports in place to assist travellers when using ArriveCAN, including online information and frequently asked questions, and telephone and email helplines.

Today, 95% of travellers are compliant with the ArriveCAN requirement and provide the information requested when asked, and we are working to improve awareness so that even more travellers comply.

[English]

The Government of Canada recognizes that there have been various issues that are causing delays for travellers at the border. However, ArriveCAN is not a significant contributor to these delays.

The vast majority of travellers use ArriveCAN successfully and without issue. For example, the ArriveCAN app has a 4.6 star rating from approximately 90,000 reviews in Google Play and a 4.5 star rating based on more than 413,000 ratings in the Apple app store.

ArriveCAN actually speeds up processing at the border; reviewing a traveller's information entered properly in ArriveCAN app takes less than 45 seconds.

PHAC understands that Canadians are eager to travel again and we want to make complying with public health measures as seamless as possible.

Based on the latest data and scientific evidence, our priority remains the health and safety of Canadians. We continue to collaborate closely with other federal departments and with our provincial and territorial colleagues as we consider the public health measures we take at the border.

Thank you, Madame Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much. I appreciate that. In order to stay within that 30 minutes that we had allocated, we will reduce the time from six minutes to five minutes, and this way we'll get the 30 minutes in and then move on to the next panel.

Mr. Baldinelli, for five minutes please.

Mr. Tony Baldinelli (Niagara Falls, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to thank the witnesses for being with us today. In the last several weeks we've seen the impact of border delays at our airports and land borders, and the potential impact it is having on our tourism sector. I'm going to go to Mr. Vinette.

In January you had talked to that CBC and there's a story that was called "Canada planning technological fixes to make crossing the border faster". You were quoted as saying that "the agency had been considering technological changes to the border—but the pandemic has allowed it to break through 'glass ceilings' that were in the way." You further mentioned that "prior to the pandemic, the CBSA had brought the average time spent speaking with a customs officer at the land border down to an average of 55 seconds." You went on to say that with the new technologies, the agency hoped to bring that average time down to 15 seconds.

While talking to stakeholders in my community I found they were facing border delays of two and a half hours. How is that working for you?

• (1735)

Mr. Denis Vinette: Undoubtedly, the processing of travellers today with the health measures and the health requirements does take additional time as compared with the time pre-COVID. We had been on a journey to modernize how we deal with travellers at the border for some time using technology. That article there referenced that investment, one of which the government had announced in the previous federal budget, in budget 2021. We term that "travel modernization". It's about ensuring that individuals have an opportunity to control, if you will, their own passage through the border. ArriveCAN allowed us to introduce the use of various technologies that were not available to us in the past and that will allow us to expedite our investments and make those transformative changes.

One example is that later this month we will be rolling out within ArriveCAN the application advance declaration where someone coming to the border will be able to pre-submit their customs immigration declaration in concert with their health declaration.

Mr. Tony Baldinelli: Mr. Vinette, what is the processing time? Seconds matter.

Mr. Denis Vinette: The processing—

Mr. Tony Baldinelli: What are the processing times, for example, at land borders at the two major border points, say, at the Ambassador Bridge or at the Peace Bridge in Buffalo, which is the second-busiest land crossing in Canada? Have they gone down?

I've have a letter from the general manager of the Buffalo and Fort Erie Public Bridge Authority. He states, "our data suggests that currently, even those that enter with ArriveCAN, have border processing times that are approximately 50% longer than prepandemic processing times without ArriveCAN." How can you explain that to me?

Mr. Denis Vinette: There are two parts to the answer. First, for the trucking community, which in Fort Erie at the Ambassador Bridge is a large group, our processing time for trucks remains the same as it was previously, and they've submitted their ArriveCAN information. They're able to cross with what we call a "reusable receipt", where we reconfirm their actual vaccination status—

Mr. Tony Baldinelli: Mr. Vinette, those trucks can't get to their inspection lanes if they're stuck behind cars that are still on the Peace Bridge, because the processing times take too long; so there, in fact, it's a failure. You may be able to cross and process the truck when it gets there, but we're losing time because those trucks are stuck behind cars that are still waiting because of the mandatory use of ArriveCAN.

I'm looking again at this. What are the processing times for visitors who are coming over at the two largest border crossings, which would be the Ambassador Bridge and the Peace Bridge?

If you could, I'd like that submitted to the committee for our information.

Mr. Denis Vinette: We'd be happy to work on the statistics you are requesting.

In terms of the processing, yes, it is about double the time, but it's not about the ArriveCAN app. If we were not utilizing the ArriveCAN app, it would actually be far longer.

Currently it's about meeting your obligations under the orders in council issued by the Public Health Agency requiring that you be vaccinated, that that be verified, and that you answer the questions on your current health status.

Mr. Tony Baldinelli: I have a letter here from the Peace Bridge authority saying that border processing times "are approximately 50% longer than prepandemic processing times".

My community is the number one tourism/leisure destination in all of Canada. It generates \$2.4 billion in tourism receipts. That was in 2019, the best tourism year ever, and we've had two devastating years since because of COVID. We're looking to save the 2022 tourism season.

Mr. Vinette, have you been to Niagara lately? Have you examined the four border crossings in my community alone? Do you understand the impact that the decisions on the mandatory use of ArriveCAN is having on our tourism community?

Mr. Denis Vinette: I have not been to Niagara Falls. I was in Vancouver last week and actually saw it in operation, both in the NEXUS lanes and in traditional crossing lanes.

On the need to verify people's vaccination status to determine whether or not they need to quarantine, whether or not they can enter under the orders in council, by receiving the pre-submission our officers have that information validated technologically and presented to them at the border. If people had to do it—and there was a period of time when we did ask them to actually show us their vaccination certificates—

• (1740)

The Chair: Sorry, Tony, your time is—

Mr. Denis Vinette: —and we had to ask all the questions—

Mr. Tony Baldinelli: Mr. Vinette, I'll take this as an invitation to come down. I'd like to show you the four bridge crossings in my community.

The Chair: We have Mr. Virani, please, for five minutes.

Mr. Arif Virani (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.): Thank you to both of the witnesses for appearing, and a special thank you to Madame Lévesque. My wife is a senior official at the Public Health Agency of Canada, and I appreciate quite directly the amount of work that all of you have been doing at PHAC for the last two-plus years. Thank you very much for all of that.

I wanted to direct my first question to Mr. Vinette and just build upon the line of discussion he was having with Mr. Baldinelli. If we take as a presumption that maintaining Canadian safety is important, and that includes from COVID and therefore the requirements to verify the vaccination status of people who are coming into the country, then we have two options for verifying that status. One would be on paper, versus some sort of digital format. Is that a fair statement from your perspective?

Mr. Denis Vinette: That is a fair statement. That was how it was actually being administered in the early days back in April 2020 when the measures came into force.

Mr. Arif Virani: Can you give us a sense of how long it was taking you and your team, whether that's CBSA officials, or PHAC officials, for that matter, when you were doing it in that written paper format? Do you have any sense of how long that was taking you per interaction back in April 2020?

I appreciate that the vaccinations were not yet developed in April 2020. If my memory serves me correctly, it was December 2020 by the time the world saw the first vaccines. But just in terms of the paper processing, can you give us a sense of the comparative time for doing this on paper versus doing this via digital app?

Mr. Denis Vinette: Absolutely. As Canadians were coming back to Canada in March 2020, into April and May of 2020, it would take anywhere from five to seven minutes to process an individual. We had to ask all of the questions in a land border environment and each officer capture it for each individual traveller, because we needed to make sure that the Public Health Agency had the information for follow-up compliance and enforcement. In the air sector, it was a question of having people complete a new form that had been created for that.

Therefore, you had two pinch points, one being if they arrived and had not completed it on the aircraft. They would take up most of the space in the airport itself as they completed the form in order to effect their passage. The second point was the officer reviewing the information and questioning the individual. By receiving it close to 99% of the time from travellers in advance by air, our officers received a green check mark, a confirmation that all of the information had been submitted, which has brought that processing time down significantly both on land and in air. That said, it is still slightly longer than it was prior to COVID.

Mr. Arif Virani: That processing time is going down. I believe Madame Lévesque said it took 45 seconds to check the vaccination status on the app versus what you described as a six or seven-minute process if it was done on paper.

Mr. Denis Vinette: Absolutely.

Mr. Arif Virani: Do you agree with what you heard from Ms. Lévesque?

Mr. Denis Vinette: Yes.

Depending on the complexity of the travelling party, 45 seconds is a low-end average for individual travellers as well as the commercial trucking sector.

Mr. Arif Virani: It goes without saying that the longer it takes for people to be processed, the more likely it is that they congregate together in an airport facility, for example. Moving people through quickly helps reduce the potential spread of the virus itself.

Is that fair?

Mr. Denis Vinette: That is fair.

Mr. Arif Virani: I have a genuine concern about moving towards digitization and automatization as we move across many government processes. We see similar things happening at IRCC, for example.

Is there still a small portion of the population that is less technologically savvy and requires a bit of assistance? How do you overcome that portion of travellers, Canadians or visitors to Canada, who just aren't in the smart phone world and aren't as technologically savvy as the rest?

How do you address that concern?

Mr. Denis Vinette: Perhaps I'll invite my colleague to competently answer, but we support all travellers, especially on arrival. We do recognize instances, and the orders in council do account for some instances where individuals have been unable to provide it for various reasons.

Perhaps Marie-Hélène would like to complement that.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Lévesque: Yes. Thank you, Denis.

The Public Health Agency as well as our partners in the airports use a facilitative approach. What we want to do is to make sure that we are eliciting compliant behaviour, but there are some barriers that are real. Those barriers are met, again, with a facilitative approach at the time of processing from a fact perspective, where we allow those specific travellers on a case-by-case basis... We invoke the exemptions that are allowed under the order in council for language reasons, physical barriers or lack of infrastructure, for example.

• (1745)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Lévesque: Thank you.

The Chair: I'm sorry to interrupt, Ms. Lévesque.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Savard-Tremblay, you have five minutes, please.

[Translation]

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to welcome all the witnesses and apologize for the delay. There have been votes in the House, which delayed the meeting.

Ms. Lévesque, have you conducted any studies and do you have any figures to present? How has the direct impact of ArriveCAN on the entry and transmission of the virus in Canada been analyzed?

Ms. Marie-Hélène Lévesque: What we do know is that we are receiving information in a much shorter time frame. As a result, once travellers have entered Canada, we are able to do post-border checks and get information to the travellers much more quickly, so that they can comply with Canada's border measures.

We also have much higher quality information. We are able to follow up more closely with travellers who are subject to border measures. The Auditor General of Canada has acknowledged that this has been greatly improved since the implementation of ArriveCAN and digital information.

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: So, in summary, this has had a positive impact on traceability. Is that correct?

Ms. Marie-Hélène Lévesque: Yes, exactly.

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Thank you.

We know that the political community decides on the issue, but that public health still submits recommendations. What are your conditions? What would allow you to recommend a potential lifting of the requirement to use the application?

Ms. Marie-Hélène Lévesque: Dr. Tam recently said in parliamentary committee that the pandemic is not over. So we definitely want to keep that ability to get the information we need at our fingertips, so we can act quickly if we need to.

When the Omicron variant arrived, for example, we had to tap into our database of travellers who had recently entered the country. Travellers who didn't think they were subject to quarantine had to undergo a surprise quarantine under the new orders to protect Canadians.

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Dr. Tam recently stated that the two vaccine doses were no longer considered up-to-date vaccination. Could ArriveCAN be adjusted for a possible third dose?

Ms. Marie-Hélène Lévesque: I will not comment on vaccination, as that is unfortunately not part of my area of expertise. I can ask my colleagues to do so in writing, if the committee would like.

However, I can tell you that ArriveCAN is improved regularly with new versions. We adapt by requiring new information or removing certain requirements as the pandemic and science evolve.

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Okay.

In summary, enforcement is currently in effect and there is no plan or indicator light, red or green. There is no decision to recommend lifting the requirement once a low enough number of cases per border entry is reached.

Does the plan currently contain a goal to achieve to get to the point of lifting the requirement to use the application?

• (1750)

Ms. Marie-Hélène Lévesque: At this time, as we are preparing for a new wave and as we have been advised that the pandemic is not over, we continue to require the use of the ArriveCAN application, and we continue to respond to the science and to the digital information needs of passengers and travellers entering the country.

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Thank you, Ms. Lévesque.

If I still have a bit of time left, I would like to ask another question.

[English]

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

[Translation]

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: In that case, I will be brief.

Mr. Vinette, I know a 75-year-old lady who had technical problems. Since she was unable to complete her application on ArriveCAN, she had to quarantine on her way in. How could that happen?

Mr. Denis Vinette: People have to comply with the requirements. We have recently become more flexible. That said, from the beginning, we have been helping as many people as possible complete their applications when they arrive.

If a traveller is quarantined in certain circumstances, there are resources they can contact. On a few occasions, we have worked with the Public Health Agency of Canada to lift the quarantine or the requirements at the border. We have measures we can take when necessary.

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Thank you, Mr. Vinette.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We have Mr. Masse for five minutes, please.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses.

It's interesting that we're dealing with this now during this current pandemic. I had to fight like heck with the union to get our CBSA frontline officers vaccinated. They had been left of...by the department for [Inaudible—Editor]

The Chair: Mr. Masse, hold on a second, please. We're having difficulty hearing you.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Dancella Boyi): Mr. Masse, your headset is not properly selected. Can I ask you to click on the upward arrow at the mute button? Please let me know what is checked off.

[Translation]

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: There is currently no interpretation.

[English]

Mr. Brian Masse: I'm sorry. I've never had a problem before.

The Chair: All right. It's working now. Continue, please.

Mr. Brian Masse: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Apologies and thanks to our witnesses.

I was just mentioning that we had to get our frontline officers vaccinated. They were left off the priority list at the beginning, but it's important that we recognize their safety.

Maybe really quickly to Mr. Vinette, I am concerned that ArriveCAN is going to be made permanent. Has there been discussion about making it a permanent feature for the land border crossings?

Mr. Denis Vinette: At this time, there has not been. This is purely the vehicle by which we capture the health requirements at the border, so it's tied very closely to the ongoing orders in council.

Mr. Brian Masse: Okay.

The Privacy Commissioner was consulted for the original ArriveCAN, and when you update it, are you continuing to consult the Privacy Commissioner?

Mr. Denis Vinette: I would have to double-check in regard to each individual release, but consistently throughout—and I see Marie-Hélène nodding—we have been engaged with them.

Mr. Brian Masse: Okay.

I just want to make sure, and maybe we can get a follow-up on that just to double-check.

With regard to the Windsor-Detroit crossing, where I am from, the tunnel bus has not operated because.... Actually, I believe it's the only place in the world where we actually have a foreign bus going into the Detroit area—the foreign bus being of course Canadian—to do routes, including, most recently for the Tigers' games and other games and even commuting. It can't operate with ArriveCAN.

Has your department reached out to the City of Windsor, which operates the only bus service we have internationally, to try to support them to be able to use ArriveCAN through their bus system? It's suspended right now because they have to literally police it themselves and the drivers just can't do that.

Mr. Denis Vinette: I will have to take that one back.

I've had the pleasure of riding that bus to a Tigers' game, so I know what you're talking about, but I'd be happy to bring that back to the committee with a more fulsome answer.

Mr. Brian Masse: Okay, that would be helpful.

I was over there for the first time last week and there was a two-hour wait. It's not only the congestion that's added. My concern is about the border wait times that have increased now, and right now we're still driving people away because they are afraid of ArriveCAN.

I will go just quickly to Ms. Lévesque.

Has there been a media company as part of the publicity for ArriveCAN, and how much advertising has gone into the States? I'd like to know what we've done to advertise this to the Americans with regard to ArriveCAN.

• (1755)

Ms. Marie-Hélène Lévesque: I am going to have to get back on the question of the specific company. I'm not familiar with the name of the company. I know we have erected some billboard space on the U.S. side as you approach some of the major border crossings.

We can provide some additional information on the specific locations and companies.

Mr. Brian Masse: Okay.

It would be interesting, too, to get a comparison. When the western hemisphere travel initiative was brought in, it was devastating to tourism, and we have still not recovered from that. It required a passport to go back and forth to the United States.

I'd be interested to see how robust the American advertising campaign has been and also what's left over to continue that if this is going to continue to be an issue.

Can you at least outline whether or not there has been more than just billboards and how much money has been spent so far on advertising in the U.S.?

Ms. Marie-Hélène Lévesque: I don't have the exact amount of money that has been spent in the U.S. I will have to take that question back. I'm sorry.

Mr. Brian Masse: That's fine. We can get that back for the committee. It would just be interesting to do a comparison.

Last of all, I had a positive response from the Minister of Public Safety yesterday. I have been calling for a safe border task force, a working group that's a management group involving the operators, the tourism industry, logistics teams and others to actively work on being proactive at the border.

Is that something you think the agencies would support?

We used to have that type of an operation before, a number of years ago, but we don't really have it right now. What type of collaboration is taking place, and do you think you'd be open to that collaboration, Mr. Vinette and Ms. Lévesque?

Mr. Denis Vinette: Yes, absolutely. We've taken as many measures as we can to work with local stakeholders to really promote the ArriveCAN app, the requirements at the border, and to analyze how we can do the passage as safely as possible for the travellers and our folks.

We are heavily engaged right now with the Toronto Airports Authority to deal with some of the challenges there in that complex ecosystem, so I am very happy to support my minister in that effort locally.

Thank you.

Mr. Brian Masse: Do I have any time left, Madam Chair?

The Chair: You have 13 seconds.

Mr. Brian Masse: I'll say thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I want to thank the witnesses for appearing today.

I will suspend briefly so that we can bring on the second panel, please.

• (1755) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1755)

The Chair: I need to make a few comments for the benefit of our second panel. Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. Please click on the microphone icon to activate your mike, and please mute yourself when you are not speaking.

You have interpretation options at the bottom of your screen of either floor, English or French, and I will remind you that your comments go through the chair.

On the second panel, we have with us, from the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, Mark Agnew, senior vice-president, policy and government relations; from the Customs and Immigration Union, Mark Weber, national president; from Destination Northern Ontario, David MacLachlan, executive director; from the Tourism Industry Association of Canada, Beth Potter, president and chief executive officer; and from Tourism Windsor Essex Pelee Island, Lynnette Bain, vice-president, destination development.

Welcome, all of you. We will start with opening remarks and then proceed with rounds of questions.

Please, Mr. Agnew, would you start us off?

Mr. Mark Agnew (Senior Vice-President, Policy and Government Relations, Canadian Chamber of Commerce): Chair and honourable members, thank you for having me back again to this committee. It is a pleasure to be here in person to do this for the first time in quite some time. Also, it's a very welcome thing from the chamber's standpoint to have this study being done as the travel season begins to ramp up for the summer.

To say that the pandemic has been a disruption for international travel is certainly an understatement for our members. We've gone through both the decimation of complete travel flows and now to the pendulum swinging the other way with travel ramping up and backlogs being seen at key points of entry, as we've all seen reported in the media.

Executing effective border policies is not optional for us, given the criticality of travel for the economy, whether it's business or tourism. We must get it right to ensure that Canada remains an attractive destination for travellers. Given the long lead-in time for event planning, organizers will take decisions today that will be felt for 12 to 18 months out in the future.

I want to turn to the committee's main topic of interest: the ArriveCAN app. The Canadian chamber has long been a proponent of digitizing border procedures to support contactless travel. Unfortu-

nately, the ArriveCAN experience has proven difficult at the border for our members and businesses across the country.

The first point to note is the duplications that the app has created. The traveller experience has been complicated by the diffuse places that the same information has to be inputted to by that individual. As someone who has travelled recently outside of the country, it is striking that the information I'm providing is both to the airline as well as through the app in more than one place.

The second point is the data requirements for the app, particularly for tourists from the U.S. who are engaging in day trips. Travellers who would engage in day trip activities simply wouldn't have things like a Canadian address. This directly impacts border communities, an assessment that we've heard from our chambers that are in those towns in those parts of the country.

Third are the concerns with the universal access, which was touched upon in the first panel that this committee heard from. Although I am fortunate enough to have the tech literacy to use the app, there are many travellers—particularly elderly travellers—who, as was stated earlier, do not have that literacy.

In preparing for this committee appearance, I was astounded to read a recent article by the CBC about a company in Maine that has monetized services to Canadians who are going back into New Brunswick by helping them fill out the ArriveCAN app for \$5 as a service. Certainly, as the business community, that's not something that we would want to see.

Also, of course, there are difficulties for people whose first languages are not English or French.

You've already heard a bit from the officials about the uptake statistics that the government is seeing for the ArriveCAN app. What I would say, though, just to build on that, is that with regard to the contact time that a border officer is spending with a traveller, certainly that has gone up quite substantially, and border infrastructure wasn't designed for those types of wait times. I think that's another key factor to bear in mind.

This isn't to say to scrap the app. As I noted a moment ago, digitizing border procedures is vital. We instead must reorient the app to focus on streamlining customs procedures as well as seeing what sorts of manual alternatives may be needed in reserve.

Ultimately, the app is, in large measure, a reflection of our country's border policies. The announcement last week of suspending randomized testing and moving testing out of airports was a welcome development, as was this week's announcement of partially lifting vaccine mandates for travellers.

However, there is certainly more work to be done. For example, the decision to lift outbound vaccination requirements may be welcome, but maintaining it for inbound travel will certainly continue to create pain points, as you have unvaccinated travellers leaving the country but then facing requirements when they come back, and that, of course, as we know, does cause additional time with border officers at points of entry.

With the summer travel season here and the last two seasons being missed, we certainly don't have the luxury of time to get this right for businesses all across the country.

Thank you for your attention. I look forward to your questions.

• (1800)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Agnew.

We have Mr. Weber, please.

Mr. Mark Weber (National President, Customs and Immigration Union): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam Chair and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today as a witness as part of your study on potential impacts of the ArriveCAN app on certain Canadian sectors.

My name is Mark Weber. I'm the national president of the Customs and Immigration Union, which represents personnel working for the CBSA, the Canada Border Services Agency.

Regarding the matter at hand, I'll be direct. If we look at the impacts of the ArriveCAN application in terms of efficiency of operation and facilitation of cross-border travel, then there is little doubt: From the perspective of border operations, as far as border officers are concerned, the last few months have shown that ArriveCAN neither facilitates cross-border travel nor improves operational efficiency. In fact, it does exactly the opposite.

Every border officer working on the front line will tell you that the implementation of the ArriveCAN application has seen processing times skyrocket. Where a port of entry processed 60 cars per hour previously, we're now looking at about 30 cars an hour, if not less. At land borders, as far as traveller operations go, this means cars waiting for hours and sometimes even being redirected to other ports further away. At airports this means travellers piling up inside and outside of the customs area. In all locations, really, it translates into a frustrating experience for all involved.

In these scenarios, ArriveCAN is not always the only culprit, but it always does play a role in making the process more complex, especially for the traveller. While ArriveCAN was introduced to collect public health data, the tool itself was more often than not the problem.

Even more troubling is the fact that the implementation of ArriveCAN by the CBSA follows the same pattern of overreliance on automated technologies that we have seen before with the primary inspection kiosk, or the PIK machines, that you see in airports. Not only do these technologies have the effect of making the border noticeably less efficient by lengthening processing times; they also contribute to a decrease in border security, weakening the integrity and safety of our borders.

Ultimately, if the government and its agencies wish to facilitate cross-border travel along with the flow of commercial goods, then ArriveCAN is really a step in the wrong direction. Technology absolutely has its place, but it should be used to help travellers and assist officers, not hinder them. By that metric, ArriveCAN simply has not worked and does not work.

It's my hope that the union's input will assist this committee in its important work.

I thank you, and I look forward to your questions.

• (1805)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Weber.

Mr. MacLachlan, go ahead, please.

Mr. David MacLachlan (Executive Director, Destination Northern Ontario): Thank you, and thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today.

I'm David MacLachlan, executive director of Destination Northern Ontario. I'm also a tourist operator, having grown up in the industry. My family operates one of the largest fly-in fishing and hunting operations in the country. This is our 65th year of business.

Destination Northern Ontario is a not-for-profit tourism organization that looks to grow the tourism sector through programming, product development, investment attraction, workforce development in industry and training and, of course, marketing.

Northern Ontario is a large region. It's roughly the size of France and Germany combined, with a robust and—prepandemic—growing tourism sector. Before COVID-19, the region saw 8.5 million visits, generating \$1.6 billion in tourism receipts and roughly \$500 million in tax revenues for the three levels of government. In 2019, 4.9% of visitors were from overseas markets and visitors from the U.S. contributed half a billion dollars in tourism revenues.

The land border is of unique importance, as 94% of all visitors to northern Ontario arrived via road.

I think we can agree that the tourism, travel and hospitality sectors have been the hardest hit of any sector impacted by the global pandemic. I want to thank all the members for all the support they have given the industry over the last two seasons.

However, the hardest hit of the hardest hit has to be the resource-based tourism sector, which is very dependent on the U.S. market. As you move from east to west in northern Ontario and get to the Lake Superior region and the northwest, virtually 100% of clients for our iconic Canadian lodges, camps and fly-in outposts come from the U.S. This is due to demographics, proximity to market and market size.

The last two years have been extremely difficult, with the region losing \$1 billion in tourism receipts from U.S. guests. The RBT sector has had tremendous difficulty in attracting domestic business. We had hoped that we would see a turnaround this year. However, a recent survey completed by Nature and Outdoor Tourism Ontario shows that the sector recorded \$100 million in cancellations in May. While the reasons vary, the vast majority cite border restrictions.

I can concur that, as an organization, this is what we're hearing from operators. We can confirm this from our own experience and our lodge business, where we saw 70 cancellations in May, again, all citing border restrictions. That represented about 15% of our business. I'd like to say that cancellations continue to outpace new reservations.

Recently, the Tourism Industry Association of Ontario, in their newsletter, indicated that border crossings in 2022 are at about 50% of 2019's. I've submitted both the NOTO survey and the TIAO newsletter to the committee.

While the ArriveCAN app is easy to use and works well—as a resident of a border community in Sault Ste. Marie, I've easily used the app—from the perspective of a visitor to Canada and, especially, for Americans crossing at the land border, it's our opinion, and the statistics show, that the app and cumulative impacts of other border restrictions are deterring visits from our friends south of the border. This is a huge loss of revenues for our operators and tax revenues for government. These are new dollars to the Canadian economy that positively impact our balance of trade. I would assume that our northern Ontario experience is repeated in other regions in Canada.

Simply said, our sector would like to see a suspension of the use of the ArriveCAN app at our land border as soon as possible and a cessation of all other border restrictions, especially as financial supports for the tourism sector have been withdrawn. We need to level the playing field with other destinations.

Thank you for the opportunity today.

I look forward to answering any questions.

• (1810)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll move on to Ms. Potter.

Ms. Beth Potter (President and Chief Executive Officer, Tourism Industry Association of Canada): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

[*Translation*]

My name is Beth Potter. I am the president and CEO of the Tourism Industry Association of Canada. I will be speaking in English, but I will be happy to answer your questions in French during the question-and-answer period.

[*English*]

Before making my remarks, I want to acknowledge that we're gathered here on the unceded and unsundered territory of the Anishinabe and Algonquin.

TIAC serves as the national advocate for Canada's tourism industry. We represent thousands of tourism businesses from coast to coast and across the suite of sectors that make up our industry. In carrying out our mandate, we work closely with our indigenous tourism industry partners as well as our provincial and territorial tourism industry associations.

To put my comments related to ArriveCAN in context, I'll first share with you some background that I believe is important for you to know, especially from an international trade perspective.

Prior to the pandemic, tourism employed one in 10 Canadians and was a \$105-billion-a-year industry. We were an economic powerhouse, one that was outpacing Canada's overall GDP growth for years. Of that total spend, 22%, or \$23 billion a year, was the result of foreign travellers coming to Canada. We were welcoming a record 32 million international visitors, 22 million of whom stayed overnight. U.S. travellers accounted for 75% of all international visitors.

Just one year later, things had changed dramatically. Total tourism spending decreased by half, and spending by foreign travellers in Canada dropped to just \$4 billion, a decrease of 83%. The number of overnight foreign travellers dropped to three million, a decrease of 86%, and the tourism industry lost 400,000 jobs. It is no exaggeration when I say that tourism was the first hit, the hardest hit, and will be the last to recover from this pandemic.

Our industry now seems to be starting to turn a corner after having lost two full travel seasons. We are really hoping that this summer will see a significant resurgence in tourism. People want to travel. There is a pent-up demand. The latest data from November of 2021 shows that tourism's GDP was 78% of what it was in January of 2020, so we're making progress. The latest projections estimate that international tourism may not recover until after 2025, but domestic tourism should recover by the end of 2023.

My colleagues have already talked about the fact that international tourism brings new money into our economy, and it's something that we have to continually remember.

Now I'd like to turn my thoughts to the ArriveCAN app specifically. When it was first introduced to curtail the spread of COVID-19 into Canada, all travellers, with limited exceptions, were required to provide mandatory travel information before and after they entered the country, whether by air, land, rail or marine vessel, and they must submit the information within 72 hours of arrival.

If an inbound traveller does not submit using the app, they may be denied boarding their plane or cruise ship or entry into the country if crossing at a land, rail or marine border crossing. Despite all best efforts, we all know that COVID spread across Canada, and the omicron variant, in particular, spread very quickly last December and January, even though the mandatory use of ArriveCAN was in place. I would argue that the mandatory use of ArriveCAN is no longer needed for COVID-related purposes.

I would concur with my colleague Mr. Agnew that looking for a digital adoption process to smooth the entry of international travellers into the country is something we have been advocating for.

With pre-departure and arrival testing now eliminated in pretty much every country, it no longer makes sense to force travellers to use ArriveCAN when entering Canada to prove vaccination status, and with yesterday's announcement around the end of vaccine mandates for domestic and outbound travellers, the point is even more sound.

ArriveCAN has not been proven to be the effective tool to stop COVID. It is largely viewed as a hindrance to travel, and it is causing significant delays upon arrival in Canada. There are a host of other issues related to the app, which my colleagues have spoken to, so I would just finish with pointing out that, on public transit, in major stadiums and in restaurants across the country, proof of vaccination is no longer required. In fact, masks are not even required; yet, when you cross the border into Canada, you have no choice but to use the app.

Something in this strikes us as a bit off, and we need to see a level playing field. Travel and tourism is the only industry that still has restrictions associated with participation in the activity. Every other industry in the economy does not.

Thank you.

• (1815)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Potter.

I go on to Ms. Bain, please, for no more than five minutes.

Ms. Lynnette Bain (Vice-President, Destination Development, Tourism Windsor Essex Pelee Island): My name is Lynnette Bain, and I am the vice-president of destination development with Tourism Windsor Essex Pelee Island. We are the official destination marketing organization for the regional tourism industry.

As a not-for-profit organization, we are dedicated to promoting and selling Windsor, Essex and Pelee Island as a remarkable destination for tourists, convention-goers and business travellers. I'd like to thank the standing committee for inviting me today to share insights on the ArriveCAN app. What you will hear from me is not that different from what my colleagues said, but it does need to be heard again.

During the initial phases of the pandemic, the federal government launched the mobile app, which streamlined the process for travellers to submit information regarding their arrival in Canada, alongside their quarantine plan. The application was useful in allowing all traveller information to be processed quickly and transmitted to the relevant government agencies, which was essential for travel during a pandemic.

Now, at this time, with the pandemic moving towards an endemic; with 82% of the total Canadian population being fully vaccinated; with hospitalization rates being greatly reduced over the past few months; and with so many protocol measures having been removed at the provincial levels, this is the time to look at removing the ArriveCAN app at the border as well.

In this case, we are in agreement with the provincial body, TIAO, the Tourism Industry Association of Ontario, on removing these barriers to travel.

While the app did serve its purpose during the height of a pandemic, it has also been viewed by travellers as a potential deterrent. Being a heavily cross-border market, our top attractions, Caesars Windsor, the largest casino resort in Canada, and our award-winning EPIC Wineries, have lost a third and between 25% and 50% respectively of their visitors from the U.S. The Muscedere and Mitchell families from EPIC Wineries have expressed to me that they've seen a 50% decline in U.S. visitation compared with 2019.

Some have viewed the app as a hassle, especially if they were not aware of the need to complete it beforehand. While we realize that there have been efforts to scale back the app significantly in terms of the number of questions and steps involved, including having a quarantine plan in place, it is still time-consuming for the travellers.

Our destination largely depends on spontaneous "rubber tire" travel, meaning visitors drive to Windsor Essex from neighbouring states such as Michigan and Ohio for daytrips or long weekends to visit friends and family. These visitors tend to spend twice as much as domestic travellers. Having any additional encumbrances can lead this highly coveted demographic of travellers to go elsewhere. Now, more than ever, we need to reignite this market, as these visitors play a significant role in bringing expenditures to our local economy, historically accounting for almost 50% of our annual five million visits.

There is a clear, pent-up demand for global travellers to come to Canada and we need to embrace this opportunity now, otherwise the desire will switch to other destinations that are hassle-free, or have fewer restrictions than what are currently being enforced here.

Seniors and people who do not have access to a smart phone or who choose to turn off their phone data when crossing an international border are struggling with the ArriveCAN app as well. The app technology, combined with the app itself, have created confusion at the border, which has contributed to significant delays.

Let's not forget about the unvaccinated, constituting 33% of Americans, who have not even been able to cross borders based on these restrictions in place.

Ultimately, it needs to be determined whether the ArriveCAN app has any substantial benefits at all to the community at large. At this time, given the aforementioned progress made against the COVID-19 virus, it appears that the benefits of the app are negligible.

It should also be announced that symptoms from an infected person with the current strain of COVID-19 can take between two and four days to present, and visitors coming back from daytrips or long weekends may not even have any symptoms until after they have completed the ArriveCAN app. Studies have also postulated that approximately 60% of the population could be asymptomatic or pre-symptomatic, which again would render the ArriveCAN app a moot point, as symptoms would not be exhibited at the time of crossing the border.

Suspending the vaccine mandate for domestic and outbound travel would be a welcome move by the federal government towards normalizing travel. As Canada is viewed as the most desired foreign travel destination by Americans at this time, it's important not only to retain this mindset, but also to build on it through the various stages of the purchase funnel.

As Beth mentioned, our tourism industries face the most significant declines in active businesses. While on the road to recovery, tourism has not kept pace with the rest of the business sector. For our local tourism-related businesses to return to some form of normalcy—restaurants, accommodations, attractions, tours, festivals and events, shops and districts themselves—we absolutely need a clear path for the traveller that does not create hesitancy, doubt, frustration or a complete disinterest in coming over to explore our region, the province or the nation.

• (1820)

To have this much-needed industry and driver in our economy return to prepandemic levels, one of the key considerations is bringing back our most valued geographic market, the U.S. It is incumbent to suspend the use of the ArriveCAN app to encourage these travellers to return to Canada in a more streamlined manner without any complications or delays at the border.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Bain.

We will move on to Ms. Ferreri.

Welcome to the committee. You have five minutes.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri (Peterborough—Kawartha, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

There are lots of familiar faces here. It's nice to see you.

Thank you to all the witnesses.

I'm going to start with Mr. Agnew, if I may.

Have you reached out directly to, or had any conversations with, the government about your concerns that the ArriveCAN app needs to be re-evaluated?

Mr. Mark Agnew: We've been talking to the government throughout about all of the various travel measures. We haven't done a major push, in traditional advocacy terms, on the ArriveCAN app, but we've certainly been having our views well stated on the public record. I don't think that where we are will come as a surprise to anyone.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Thank you for that.

I would like to move to Mr. Weber.

Mr. Weber, thank you for your candid and honest feedback about the app. These are some quotes of yours: "The tool itself" is "the problem". It's "a step in the wrong direction". It has not and "does not work".

My question to you is this: Do you think it should be fully removed, or do you think it should be changed or modified to work better?

Mr. Mark Weber: Thank you for the question.

Public health measures are not really our territory to comment on.

What I can tell you is that the numbers provided to you earlier by the CBSA, which said that 99% of air travellers and 94% of land travellers have the app completed, are absolutely false. Those num-

bers are the percentages completed after we helped them complete with the app. In the Eastern Townships branches, the numbers were closer to 60%, for example. Overall, we're looking at closer to 75% to 80% having it completed.

Essentially, our officers now largely work as IT consultants. You have land borders that have essentially become parking lots, with us helping people complete the app. The biggest fear we have, as well, is that, other than public health measures, the use of this app is going to be expanded beyond those simple questions. Technology... Again, we've seen the effects of it at airports, as I mentioned, with the PIK kiosks. It greatly reduces our border security and takes an awful lot longer to go through than simply speaking to a border services officer. We can process someone at twice the speed a machine does.

The ArriveCAN app, even were it removed, is just a small part of the problem. Our frontline operations over the years... Because of this overreliance on technology, our numbers have been greatly reduced. In some ports, we're looking at half the number of frontline officers we had even five or six years ago. Even with the app gone, we are going to be seeing major delays at most of our ports of entry.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Thank you so much for that.

I want to go back to you, again, Mr. Agnew, because you said some pretty disturbing things. The fact that people are monetizing people's inability to use the app is a major concern. I've been flooded at my constituency office with seniors who can't use it. They have BlackBerrys, but they don't have smart phones.

Two things have been proposed, and I'm curious about your feedback on them: Drop it at land borders, or lose the 72-hour prerequisite. What are your thoughts on those?

Mr. Mark Agnew: I think that, whatever we do for land, we probably should do for air, as well. If I look back, where we've had a lot of member complaints—since the start of the pandemic—is in the diffuse rules that exist among different modes of travel. Whatever we do needs to be consistently applied.

In terms of questions about what to do with it, I think a suspension, in the short term, would probably be a pretty shrewd and practical move to ease up some of the congestion. It is going to take time to pivot this into a customs clearance-type app. I believe that CBSA, in the previous panel—if I heard them correctly—said they were moving down that direction. However, even retooling it, in that way, will take time.

In terms of the 72-hour piece, whether it's 72, 48 or 24 hours, or five minutes, I think you're still going to encounter a lot of these same problems, particularly with elderly folks and people whose first language isn't English. I don't think that is going to fundamentally change the issue.

• (1825)

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Thank you very much for that.

Ms. Potter, do you have an estimate on what the contribution of the ArriveCAN app would have been, financially? You talked about going from a \$105-billion industry to a \$4-billion one, and a loss of 400,000 jobs. Where do you think the responsibility of ArriveCAN falls into that?

Ms. Beth Potter: I think that's really hard for us to understand.

I do think we've seen all border restrictions having a massive impact on the return of our industry. It has certainly put Canada behind—from a competitive standpoint with the other G7 countries, at least—many other countries in the world, when it comes to regaining our travel and tourism portfolio.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Potter.

We'll move to Mr. Sheehan for five minutes.

Go ahead, please.

Mr. Terry Sheehan (Sault Ste. Marie, Lib.): Thank you very, Madam Chair.

Thank you very much to all of our witnesses for this really important testimony for a really important part of the Canadian economy.

I for one spent most of my life in the tourism industry. I was a sales and marketing manager for the largest independent hotel in northern Ontario. I managed Searchmont ski resort, which was the largest mountain, as we used to say, between the Rockies and the Laurentians. I used to be chair of the Sault College hospitality advisory committee.

I totally get what everyone is saying and how important this industry is. I met my wife. She was working in the tourism industry. We bought a house together and raised our family. What we need to do and ought to do is to make sure that we continue to support the tourism industry.

Madam Chair, as I introduce myself to some of the panellists who don't know me, I want to ask David how important the supports were, including the wage subsidy that, David, you and a whole bunch of other people advocated for so strongly along with those changes that happened.

David, you made some comments about some of the supports that have recently been passed through the 2022 budget for the tourism industry to continue to support you as you recover, as we now start to see levels of travel increasing, which is a good thing. Perhaps you could address some of those comments regarding the kinds of supports that have helped the industry and what kinds of supports will continue to help the industry.

Mr. David MacLachlan: Thank you for the question.

Certainly the wage subsidy was huge for the tourism sector in northern Ontario and especially for those who were dependent on the U.S. market and unable to attract the domestic visitor. In terms of our lodge, we went from 500 customers in 2019 to 52 in 2020. With the wage subsidy, we were able to protect our core staff of six to work for us. Last year, we had a bit of rebound. We were up to 200 guests. Again, that wage subsidy meant that we were able to keep eight staff working—including two students—for the season.

That has primarily been the biggest support to us. I know that a lot of properties have applied for the tourism relief fund and for help through FedNor as well. I know there are some programs through the CFDCs. In our case, we did take out a loan with our CFDC because we didn't want to fall behind in our capital upgrade program and in purchasing boats. We didn't want to sting the marina for the boats and motors that we had ordered and leave them hanging. Even though we knew we were only going to have 52 customers, we still purchased those.

The northern Ontario and especially the RBT sector is not going to recover until the U.S. visitors can get across. I think Lynnette talked about the vaccination rate in Michigan. Overall, it's only 56% in Michigan, so it's quite an uphill climb for our sector.

As far as using the app goes, I'm not an epidemiologist. I just don't see how it makes it safer for us, because I can go to Mackinac Island next week—the largest tourist attraction in the U.S. Midwest—and spend the day and hang out with all kinds of people who are ineligible to come to Canada, yet I can come back because I'll use the app. There was a time and place, but we just need to look at what we can do to remove restrictions where we can and to get people moving again.

• (1830)

Mr. Terry Sheehan: I hear that, absolutely.

Where I live, every morning when I wake up and have my coffee, I open up my window and I can see the United States. We know that in Michigan, their vaccine rates are, in particular, across the board, significantly lower than those of Canadians, which, back in the day, when the borders were closed, resulted in the number of cases of COVID in Michigan alone rivalling the number in all of Canada. That was really important.

Both you and I also lived through 9/11, after which the passport was introduced. When the passport was introduced, as everyone here who was paying attention at the time knows, the Americans didn't go out and get their passports. They just, at the time—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Sheehan. Your time is up.

Mr. Terry Sheehan: Oh, I'm sorry.

The Chair: My apologies.

Monsieur Savard-Tremblay, please.

[Translation]

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to quickly address the five witnesses. I have a very simple question for them, and I would like them to answer with a yes or no. This is just a little detour before we get back to ArriveCAN.

Do you support lifting the vaccination requirement for people returning to Canada?

I would like the witnesses attending the meeting in person to answer the question first.

Do you support lifting this requirement in the short term, yes or no?

[English]

Mr. Mark Agnew: Yes.

Ms. Beth Potter: Yes.

[Translation]

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: What do those participating in the meeting by videoconference think?

[English]

The Chair: Would someone like to answer?

[Translation]

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: My question is now for the witnesses participating in the meeting virtually.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. MacLachlan, do you want to go first?

Mr. David MacLachlan: I personally would be in favour. Yes.

The Chair: Mr. Weber...?

Mr. Mark Weber: I'm not a public health expert.

Ms. Lynnette Bain: I would choose the same response.

[Translation]

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: That's great, thank you.

My next question is for the witnesses who said they are in favour of lifting the vaccine requirement.

Do you think the issue is the vaccine requirement or the ArriveCAN application?

[English]

Mr. Mark Agnew: I think that because the vaccine mandate only applies to outbound travel and you're not using ArriveCAN for outbound travel, in that sense it's been slightly decoupled, based on the announcement that was made this week. The caveat I would give, though, is that because unvaccinated individuals are now going to be able to travel, they have to come back into Canada. I think that's where you're going to see additional bottlenecks created. They have to go through the ArriveCAN verification.

Ms. Beth Potter: The fact that you have both—the ArriveCAN app and the change in the vaccine mandate that was announced this week—has just made it much more confusing for Canadian travellers and for international travellers who are considering Canada as a destination.

[Translation]

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: The ArriveCAN application requires proof of vaccination. That information has to be entered at some point. I know this because I did it a few weeks ago.

My next question is for the Customs and Immigration Union representative and the Tourism Windsor Essex Pelee Island representative. They did not comment because they are not experts in public health.

If the health measures were maintained, how would they be maintained without enforcement?

[English]

Ms. Lynnette Bain: I think what the industry needs to hear is what the benchmarks are that need to be achieved before these types of restrictions can be removed. I think having that information, and having that communicated and shared, would help the industry know how to plan and know what to expect.

I think confusion right now is the biggest issue. As I said, not being a public health expert, I'm not able to say whether I want to let unvaccinated travellers in. I mean, it's hindering our ability to attract the number of visitors who were previously coming to our destination.

• (1835)

[Translation]

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Mr. Weber, do you want to add anything?

[English]

Mr. Mark Weber: Yes. Thank you.

If the only requirement is to show proof of vaccination, you simply put the officers back on the front line and get them to ask people to show proof of vaccination. You don't need the application to do that.

Again, on the idea that this app is easy to complete, I can tell you, and you can ask anyone working on the front line, that it is working all day helping people complete that app. It is not to say that it is a free app to use when you know what roaming fees are in a foreign country, not to mention that at many of our ports of entry we don't have Wi-Fi for them to complete it.

The app is a big problem.

The Chair: You have 40 seconds remaining, Monsieur Savard-Tremblay.

[Translation]

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Mr. Weber, why would it be faster to use your own application and have an agent scan these codes?

How is that faster than filling out ArriveCAN in advance?

[English]

Mr. Mark Weber: The issue is that it's quite often not filled out in advance, which means cars parked, people at the airport lined up filling out the app, and us, rather than processing travellers, taking the time to help people fill out the app.

You can show me your proof of vaccination on a phone. You can simply show it. If that's the only requirement, that's really all you need. That would take a second with an officer.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[Translation]

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: We'll go on to Mr. Masse for five minutes.

Mr. Brian Masse: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I can assure you that if parliamentarians had to use ArriveCAN every time they had to return to the precinct, they wouldn't have this app. It would be dropped quicker than anything else.

I think Mr. Weber hit on it, and I'd like to go with him first. It's particularly frustrating that this is really just a resource issue. We're forcing some type of a technology here that's temporary, versus if you actually have a process—and you just gave a good example—where you could use your phone or give a print-off quickly to the officer. They're capable of doing that, are they not?

Mr. Mark Weber: Absolutely. Now, because a lot of these technologies that have been put in, the few officers we have left on the front line are taking all their time helping people fill out an app.

Mr. Brian Masse: The ironic thing is that when we started during the pandemic—I mentioned it to the previous panel—I had to work with our local CBSA union and Ken Turner down here to actually get them on the list of prioritization for vaccination because the CBSA officers were left off the original list. Now they're doing more work by handling people's personal property.

Is there any other example that you have of officers having to deal with actually taking people's phones or using people's material as they're trying to process themselves at the border?

Mr. Mark Weber: Yes. It's everything we could do to help people get the app completed properly, so they can be allowed entry into Canada. It's an incredible drain on resources. It's a drain on time.

The app is not the only problem. Our greatly reduced numbers over the years of officers working on the front line is a significant problem as well. Even if the decision is to no longer use the app, the lack of personnel at the front line will still cause delays. That's something that has to be addressed as well.

Mr. Brian Masse: I agree. There's no doubt about that. Much more effort.... It takes a long time to actually get our officers on the training and then they're also poached at different times. It's a very important position.

I'm going to move over to Ms. Bain.

With regard to the affected tourism sector, I think what frustrates me a little bit as an MP from an area affected by tourism is that we have a new technology or a new process here that's different from the rest of the other sectors in Canada. Tourism really got the bum's rush with regard to support for the pandemic to begin with, but now it has this increased continued complication that other industries don't have.

Wouldn't it make sense to still support some of those businesses if we're actually going to have a process in place that we know damages the tourism sector?

Ms. Lynnette Bain: I think the continued support for the tourism industry is essential. We're seeing businesses suffer from not only the lack of visitation from the U.S. market, but from people's pock-

etbooks being so affected by inflation and rising prices. Businesses are worried about paying back their CEBA loans.

There's a lot of concern and angst right now among our small tourism operators with some of these financial constraints. With what was supposed to be an exciting season that they were looking to welcome, they're a bit fearful right now and hesitant to invest and expand.

There have been great supports. I think the tourism relief fund was a welcomed resource for a lot of these operators, but it was only able to touch so many.

There are those who struggle with technology, as far as applying for those supports. Understanding the technology is really an issue.

• (1840)

Mr. Brian Masse: When the western hemisphere travel initiative started and the requirement for passports, there was a grace period so that the travel industry could actually help coach their own customers on the changes that were coming and how to actually get their passports. That's not possible in this case because they can't get over there if they don't have the app to begin with. Tourism operators are terribly victimized because they can't even help their own customer base.

Ms. Lynnette Bain: We've developed a website called crossing-madeeasy.com. That was actually through the western hemisphere travel initiative. It's been brought back to life because we're trying to get to those people. Our phones in our office do ring off the hook from Americans who are confused. We spend a lot of time walking them through how they can cross. Sometimes they just get frustrated and give up.

I was crossing by a marine vessel on the weekend and I had to personally complete the app for eight people because they were getting so frustrated. Going over to the U.S. side was a breeze. It was two minutes. We had our approval quickly. Coming back took an hour and a half.

Mr. Brian Masse: Yes. With the passport waiting times, we've had people making cottage industries at \$15 an hour for students. Maybe they'll start charging people to actually make money to download the app for people.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Masse.

Mr. Brian Masse: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: We will move on to Mr. Lewis for four minutes.

Mr. Chris Lewis (Essex, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. MacLachlan, I could speak for about five hours with you, sir, with regard to being an outfitter, because I myself am an outfitter. Please do reach out to my office, perhaps, because I'd love to have a chat with you on that front, specifically with regard to northern Ontario and how we can help out the outfitters.

I'm going to direct the last three minutes and 45 seconds of my questions to Mr. Weber.

Mr. Weber, my riding of Essex neighbours Mr. Masse's riding. I also know Mr. Turner. In my role as shadow minister for labour, I've spoken to Mr. Turner at length.

I understand it to be true...and I would love to hear your feedback, sir, with regard to the frustration of CBSA officers working at the borders and the redundancy of the job they're doing. Could you please speak to that a little bit?

Mr. Mark Weber: Yes. Absolutely I can. We're talking specifically about southern Ontario, but I hear it across the country, everywhere I go. Our job is to keep Canadians safe. Our job is to enforce laws at the border and to facilitate travel. The enforcement aspect of our job is almost gone at this point. Our job is almost predominantly getting travellers through as quickly as we possibly can, helping people fill out the ArriveCAN app.

Again, the technologies we put in place and the technologies that are being planned with eGate—PIK machines at the airport are already there—greatly reduce the number of travellers we interact with. They greatly reduce our ability to interdict anything that Canadians want us to be interdicting. The job has become predominantly about facilitation and just helping people fill out the app. Again, it's kind of an assembly line: Just keep the line moving.

The CBSA has come to us with a summer action plan. They're looking at such things as mandatory overtime for our officers just to take care of that backlog because of the lack of staff and the extra time involved due to the ArriveCAN app. People are being pulled off assignments to put staff back on the front line. It is a desperate situation.

We're talking about the ArriveCAN app, but the lack of frontline staff at our borders does not go away after the summer. That's been around for a long time. We had that little reprieve during the pandemic, but that situation has been getting progressively worse for years.

Again, the focus is not about our doing our jobs. It's simply about moving people through as quickly as possible.

Mr. Chris Lewis: Thank you, Mr. Weber.

Through you, Madam Chair, I'll go back to Mr. Weber.

Let's talk about the staffing for a moment. My biggest concern is that, again, it's the busiest international border in North America, with the largest amount of commerce and trade going back and forth. We're not only talking about folks who go back and forth to Michigan to grab some groceries for the day or to go watch a ball game. We're also talking about people who are literally keeping our commerce going.

I'm curious, sir; do you believe that it may be true that keeping ArriveCAN could be an opportunity for the government to cut back on staff, on CBSA officers?

Mr. Mark Weber: That's absolutely the fear. That's essentially what we've seen happen at our airports. As the PIK machines have taken over, we've seen the number of staff working the front line at the airports go down and down and down over the years, to the point where we don't have the people in place to interact with travellers and verify their declarations. When it's busy, you're almost going purely with what the traveller's declaration is. That enforcement aspect, or verifying declarations....

I mean, obviously, anyone who's trying to bring something into Canada that they shouldn't, or is coming into Canada to do something that they shouldn't be doing, is never, ever putting it on their declaration. The real fear is that the expansion of the ArriveCAN app will see that expanded to land borders as well, where you pre-declare, you go through an automated eGate kind of system, and you have absolutely no interaction with the border services officer.

That would allow the CBSA to reduce those frontline staff members again. That's really the fear. Again, I've not heard specific plans of that for the ArriveCAN app, but one could see it going there. Absolutely.

• (1845)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Weber.

Mr. Virani, you have four minutes.

Mr. Arif Virani: I'll go a little bit fast here. I appreciate that most people have been pretty straightforward in indicating that they're not public health experts. That would include yours truly.

Mr. Agnew, I'll ask you some questions first, since I'm most familiar with you and you're most familiar with this committee. It's good to see you again.

You start out by saying that obviously businesses in Canada were heavily affected by COVID. That's a fair statement, right? I think Mr. MacLachlan indicated that a lot of supports were put in place during COVID, including the wage subsidy, CEBA and things like that, which helped keep some businesses afloat and retain workers. That's fair?

Mr. Mark Agnew: Absolutely.

Mr. Arif Virani: And those would have applied to businesses that you represent, the same types of businesses that David was mentioning.

The basic proposition is that limiting the spread of COVID just helps people stay engaged with the economy. Is that fair?

Mr. Mark Agnew: That would be correct.

Mr. Arif Virani: Do we agree that vaccines help limit the spread of COVID—perhaps not every variant, as we're seeing with omicron—but for the most part they help limit the spread of COVID? Is that fair?

Mr. Mark Agnew: That seems to be what the Public Health Agency tells me about reducing the adverse medical outcomes, hospitalization, etc.

Mr. Arif Virani: I appreciate neither of us is medically trained, but I would agree with you. I'm just trying to put to you things that I take as generally understood.

What I remember is that during the height of the pandemic, businesses that tangentially you represent were asking me about how to protect their staff. That's when things like vaccine mandates started to get mooted as ideas. They were saying, the servers in my restaurant don't want to come to work because they're worried about the patrons who are coming in and whom they'll be serving at the table, and they'd like to know that those persons were vaccinated. It would make them feel more comfortable. It helped the business owner of the restaurant retain the servers.

Is that fair? Did you hear similar commentary during the course of the pandemic?

Mr. Mark Agnew: Not everyone was uniformly happy about the mandates being imposed in the business community, but certainly it was a boost of confidence for a lot of folks.

I think, though, given where we are now in the pandemic, the attitude within the business community has certainly changed about how to apply vaccine mandates.

Mr. Arif Virani: I'm hearing that loudly and clearly, and that instinct informs part of the decision you saw getting changed last week.

It seems to me where we're at is that if we understand that vaccines help limit the spread of many COVID variants—but perhaps not the most recent one—and that understanding vaccinations status helps businesses writ large, then it's a question of what we're doing in terms of checking vaccination status. And if we're checking it, how do we check it?

I'm going to turn to you, Mr. Weber. You've been pretty blunt, so I'm going to be pretty blunt.

I wanted to put to you the evidence that we heard in the last half hour, which is that checking on paper could take six to seven minutes versus checking an app where, if it's being done correctly, it's taking 45 seconds.

I presume you heard that testimony. Do you disagree with that testimony you heard from Ms. Lévesque and Mr. Vinette?

Mr. Mark Weber: I absolutely do. Those times are absolutely inaccurate.

Mr. Arif Virani: Is that because, from your perspective, what your staff are doing is helping people with an app?

Mr. Mark Weber: Yes, and about quarter of the time, that app is not being completed or even started when people arrive at the border. You can imagine the numbers.

Mr. Arif Virani: I'm going to apply a bit of lawyer's logic here, so please forgive me.

You are here representing the union; you're here to protect your members. That makes sense. I get it. But you've indicated that you have concerns not just with this form of digitization via the Arrive-CAN app, but also with the PIK kiosks. Are there any technological innovations that you and your union do support at our borders?

Mr. Mark Weber: We support technological innovations as long as the officers are still in place to do the work. What we're seeing now is that the numbers of officers are being greatly reduced as the technology gets increased. Technology, like a PIK machine, really doesn't work if you have no officers available to verify people's declarations. You essentially—for lack of a better way of putting it—don't really have a border. That's all it is. If everyone can come in and it's just a self-declaration—

Mr. Arif Virani: I guess you and I will disagree on whether we have a border.

• (1850)

The Chair: Thank you all very much.

Mr. Arif Virani: I would note for your edification that many of the cuts to the CBSA services actually predate our government coming into office. I presume you're aware of that.

Mr. Mark Weber: Yes.

The Chair: Mr. Savard, you have two minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: I will throw out an open question. Anyone who wants to answer it can do so.

The Public Health Agency tells us that they are preparing for the next wave. So there will continue to be health measures.

How can we use technology to enforce these measures at the borders? If not through ArriveCAN, what should we do?

[English]

The Chair: Whoever would like to answer, please go ahead in the limited time.

Mr. Mark Weber: I think you put the officers in place to process the travellers as they come through one at a time and use those resources, rather than having them help complete an app that, clearly, people are having a very difficult time completing.

Mr. Mark Agnew: I don't want to sound too philosophical about it.

The technology is ultimately a reflection of the policy. I think from our standpoint, we recognize that there will be another wave of COVID at some point, but I couldn't tell you what the plan is right now. We've been asking for a plan and we hope that the government will produce one for how we're going to respond to that, because reverting back to lockdowns and imposing the tools that we used in the earlier waves is not a situation that we'd want to go back to ideally.

[Translation]

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: If health measures were to continue, how could we improve cross-border trade, Mr. Agnew?

[English]

The Chair: Give a brief answer, please, Mr. Agnew.

Mr. Mark Agnew: It's hard to have a crystal ball to know for sure how we help them, but I think what we need to make sure of, though, is that there is a plan in place that is durable, because we can't keep flip-flopping around, as we've seen.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Masse, you have two minutes.

Mr. Brian Masse: Thank you, Madam Chair.

To Mr. Weber again, with regard to the training that's necessary, how long does it take to train an officer?

Mr. Mark Weber: Rigaud College has an 18-week program. Then there's one year of essentially apprenticeship before you become a full officer.

Mr. Brian Masse: Even ramping up, it's going to take so much time that we should have been on this before. We should never have cut...but that's another story.

Again, with the documentation that you're suggesting be handed over, we do that with passports and other documents that are asked for. We're essentially getting, with ArriveCAN, a NEXUS program, but not the screening that NEXUS provides, so if you don't see anybody.... You also have your members trained to interact with people so they understand their personalities and can target behaviours. Is that not correct?

Mr. Mark Weber: That's correct, yes.

Mr. Brian Masse: Then we're diminishing public safety. Is that why you said that at the beginning of your remarks, that it's diminishing public safety?

Mr. Mark Weber: That is absolutely the case. As I said, our officers go through all of this training specifically on how to enforce the law, interdiction indicators and all of those kinds of things, and it's essentially not being used. When I use the term "IT consultants", that's pretty close to what most of our jobs are now.

Mr. Brian Masse: Ironically—I'll quickly finish, Madam Chair—when you get your ArriveCAN done, one of the things you're told that you should do is to take a picture, as I did on my ArriveCAN thing, so that if it happens to be failing, you could hand it to the officer so the officer could look at it. This is the same thing as if you were presenting them with documentation that you had your vaccinations to begin with, making it all redundant.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Masse.

Our last speaker is Mr. Baldinelli for four minutes, please.

Mr. Tony Baldinelli: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to thank all the stakeholders for being with us today.

It's already June 15, and 75% of the tourism revenues are going to be generated within 25% of the year, which is June onwards. In

only four months, the tourism sector will look to generate 75% of the revenues they need.

You all mentioned the importance of American visitors and that the continued use of ArriveCAN is placing a great impediment on the free flow of visitors into Canada. It's serving as a disincentive to wanting to come to Canada.

Ms. Potter, do you believe that the continued use of ArriveCAN places the 2022 tourism year in jeopardy?

• (1855)

Ms. Beth Potter: It certainly is having a negative impact on the number of international visitors who are arriving. The forecasting that we've seen looks at different countries and how fast we expect they will come back. Right now, the U.S. will be the last country to get back to 2019 numbers. It will take us until almost 2026 to do so.

Mr. Tony Baldinelli: Excellent. In my own community again, American visitors are about 23% or 25% of our visitor base, but they account for over 50% of the revenues generated. In 2019, the best tourism year in my community, we generated \$2.4 billion in tourism receipts. That's at risk because of the impact of the border and the difficulties that are being placed on the industry.

You indicated earlier that, following the budget, several programs ended and no additional dollars were provided. My rationale to the government is saying that, if you're not going to provide any additional supports to the tourism sector and you've ended the programs that the stakeholders had asked to be extended, let them do what it is that they do best, and that is to welcome people from throughout the world.

That's my call to the government. Let's stop the mandatory use of this ArriveCAN application. Would you agree with that?

Ms. Beth Potter: I would. It's really hard for visitors—and we have 10 million day visitors coming across the border from the U.S. every year—to complete the ArriveCAN app, because they don't have an address in Canada to which they're going and they don't have a place where they can quarantine. They are having a really big challenge; thus, we are seeing up to 50% fewer U.S. travellers coming across for day trips as it stands right now. This includes seniors groups travelling on motorcoaches.

I was talking to people at some of our duty-free stores just last week, and whereas they would normally get 50 motorcoaches coming through their store on a weekend, they're now getting two.

Mr. Tony Baldinelli: I'll ask one last question if I can. This is for Mr. Weber.

You indicated some of the difficulties in the role that your officers are playing. You're saying that they're assuming more of an IT consultant role in assisting Americans who simply don't know about the application when they reach the border. The government indicated today that they're buying billboards. That's totally insufficient.

I wanted to ask this question. Did the government approach the union to discuss the implementation of ArriveCAN for the officers, how it would be implemented and how it would impact staff?

Mr. Mark Weber: We were not consulted at all on anything that was planned or rolled out. Again, you would think that they would ask the people who work on the border every day how best to do things at the border, but that simply wasn't the case.

Mr. Tony Baldinelli: Exactly.

Thank you.

The Chair: Ms. Dhillon, I can probably squeeze in one question, if you'd like.

Ms. Anju Dhillon (Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle, Lib.): Sure. My question is for Mr. Agnew.

In your opinion, what kind of epidemiological indicators should be considered when determining lifting, or reinstating, public health measures at the border?

Mr. Mark Agnew: Sorry. You mean reinstating the ones that were lifted this past week?

Ms. Anju Dhillon: Yes.

Mr. Mark Agnew: That's a question outside of our expertise, and I'll readily admit that. My wife would love to hear me say on

the record that I get it wrong and I don't always know the answer. I'll clip and save that for her.

Kidding aside, if the government has a plan, I haven't seen it. I think it's really critical that we use the period right now for the government to talk to industry about what the plan is to live with COVID-19 in the endemic phase—if I'm allowed to use that term, as a non-epidemiological expert.

Ms. Anju Dhillon: Would you take into account the global epidemiological context yourself, as well, putting the government aside?

Mr. Mark Agnew: Absolutely. I think everything we do in the pandemic response should look at the global situation. That's in part, for instance, why we're saying we should be lifting things like vaccine mandates, because other countries have gone in that direction. What's going on globally is going to be important.

Ms. Anju Dhillon: Perfect. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you all very much.

Thank you to our witnesses.

I have to move adjournment.

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